



2006 National Student Summit on Oceans and Coasts

Teens Commit to Community Action to Promote Environmentally Healthier Coasts & Oceans

Executive Summary

Introduction: Coastal America celebrated its 10 year partnership with 18 Coastal Ecosystem Learning Centers (CELC), December 5th to 8th 2006, by hosting a National Student Summit on Oceans and Coasts. The unique educational approach of the Summit brought together formal and informal educators and offered high school students unparalleled exposure to national ocean leaders. The Summit was guided by the premise that such exposure would benefit all involved and would advance an ocean literate and an involved citizenship beyond Summit participation and school curriculum. This paper highlights and summarizes the Summit held in Washington, D.C. (See www.coastalamerica.gov for more information.)

Background: Since its inception in 1996, the CELCs are characterized as premiere leaders in their communities, as aquaria, museum, or research centers focused on coastal and ocean outreach and education. The federal partnership recognizes the CELCs as specialists in effective communication with all age groups, with a collective audience of over 20 million people annually. The U.S. Ocean Action Plan and the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy Report among others stress the critical concerns confronting our coasts and oceans, including the need for ocean awareness and education, both formal and informal. The Ocean Action Plan validated the essential role that informal institutions such as CELCs play in promoting ocean literacy by inspiring a strong conservation ethos. The National Student Summit was unique in that it seamlessly meshed formal and informal education, i.e., curricula, factual-based classroom learning and discovery-based, real setting learning. The result was expanded knowledge, shared discoveries, and an emotional pull to commitment and personal action. The Students left the Summit with factual data but most importantly, committed to an environmental agenda of cooperative conservation and personal stewardship.

The Summit: Each CELC was invited to select 4 students, 1 teacher, and 1 CELC representative, possessing the core values of leadership, academic rigor, intellectual curiosity, and a firm commitment to action. An academically elite and culturally diverse student body emerged, some students from advanced placement classes; others with strong potential in need of mentorship. As one observer noted, "the broad socioeconomic range of the delegation population-- racial, ethnic, cultural, women-- is encouraging and exhilarating." A website forum and routine conference calls were used to communicate in preparing delegations. Each CELC delegation arrived in Washington, D.C. factually versed in a self-selected local environmental issue and well prepared with professional posters and presentations outlining the delegation's action plan. On day one, students made presentations before a distinguished panel of government leaders, who provided critique and encouragement. On day two, professional facilitators led students in discussion groups, challenging delegates to build upon their collective knowledge and shared discoveries by synthesizing their presentations into national messages, recommendations, and commitments. Specifically, students developed: (1) national priority issues and messages which they presented to a panel of ocean experts; (2) national recommendations which they delivered to Congressional and Administration officials during a mock-Congressional hearing at the U.S. Capitol; and (3) signed and delivered a *Proclamation and Commitments* to Congressional and White House officials.

Action Plans: Delegation action plans included: outreach and exploration (e.g., mentoring at risk youth; ocean literacy surveys and outreach; tidal power); living resources plans (e.g., bycatch; oyster gardening; recycling; diamondback terrapins); habitat restoration projects (e.g., efforts on the Everglades; Chicago Nature Restoration; Noisette Creek); pollution and harmful algal blooms (e.g. borrow pits; red-tide; run-off pollution reduction; nutrients in Elkhorn Slough); and, watersheds and coasts (e.g., reforestation/Chesapeake watershed; redesigning a river; pointing to runoff).

Student Commitments: The students pledged to serve as role models of environmental stewardship; to close the gap between knowledge and caring to increase ocean literacy; to promote ocean awareness through personal action; and to promote environmental awareness by perpetuating the stewardship of natural resources. Examples of specific commitments include: advocate for tidal power by educating our community about renewable energy; present educational programs to schools and communities; recruit volunteers for oyster reef restoration; engage others through drama, literature, and service learning; educate to reduce unnecessary rockfish deaths due to bycatch; replant seagrasses to keep water clean; create environmental resolutions suitable for all stakeholders; mentor at-risk youth; educate locally about the consequences of deforestation; organize tree replantings; community outreach on terrapin conservation; publicize and mitigate the hazards of runoff; ensure that contaminated dredge material is properly disposed; and implement proactive programs, e.g., oyster shell recycling.

Summit Activities: Recognizing the need to balance rigorous academic Summit activities with the inherent student desire to tour Washington, D.C., a variety of sponsors and locations were secured for student sessions, providing students unique access to the Nation's capital. Summit venues included: the National Academies of Science; the National Aquarium in Washington, DC; the Ronald Reagan International Trade Center; the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, the Senate Hart Office Building. Additionally, VIP tours were arranged to include: The White House, The U.S. Capitol; and the U.S. Naval Observatory. Similarly, organizers selected keynote speakers that would expose students to broad academic disciplines including science, government, economics, arts, literature and communication. Keynote events included: a play about the life of Rachel Carson, entitled *A Sense of Wonder*, written and performed by Kaiulani Lee; explorer Phillippe Cousteau, President Earth Echo; cartoonist, Jim Toomey creator of *Sherman's Lagoon*, Greg Marshall, creator of National Geographic's Critter Cam; Dr. Sylvia Earle, Ocean Explorer; explorer, Dr. Bob Ballard, President Mystic Aquarium Institute for exploration. Distinguished government officials included: Senator Ted Stevens (R-AK), President-Pro-tempore of the Senate; Congressman Sam Farr (D-CA), Co-Chair House Ocean Caucus; the Honorable James L. Connaughton, Chairman, White House Council on Environmental Quality; Lynn Scarlett, Deputy Secretary US Department of Interior, and others.

Quotes & Comments: *It is comforting to know there are youth in the world who are active in their community and want to help make a positive change in the world around them—Tina Smith, (teacher) Oregon Coast Aquarium and Hatfield Marine Science Center. Before I came to the Summit, I thought the ocean wasn't in that much trouble, but our oceans are in trouble now and my generation has to do something—Madison Gattis, (student) Scott Aquarium. I thought students really couldn't make a difference but now I believe students can make as much difference as they are willing—Christina, (student) National Aquarium in Baltimore. Through the Summit, I was able to participate in things I never would have thought possible. This Summit has given me a voice and an opportunity to use it.—Ilorra Fern (student) Waikiki Aquarium; I was so proud of the work our kids did at the Summit. They took this seriously, and are constantly out in the community continuing their action plan.—(CELC.Expert)*

Follow Up & Next Steps: Coastal America and its funding sponsors put in place a series of reporting requirements to track delegations through implementation phases of their plans; and to track students' commitment to environmental education and stewardship. Coastal America will use student case studies, journals, and surveys, to determine Summit success long-term.

Submitted by: Marguerite Duffy, Coastal America Deputy Director for Education & Outreach